

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 295724

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SUBJECT: CUBAN INTENTIONS TOWARD MOZAMBIQUE AND RHODESIA:
REPLY TO BRITISH REQUEST

REF: LONDON 19096 (NODIS)

1. SECRETARY HAS APPROVED FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT OF CUBAN INTENTIONS TOWARD MOZAMBIQUE AND RHODESIA FOR DELIVERY TO BRITISH GOVERNMENT AS PER REFTEL.
2. BEGIN TEXT: CUBAN ENTHUSIASM FOR PROVIDING ADDITIONAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO MOZAMBIQUE HAS PROBABLY DIMINISHED ALONG WITH THE EUPHORIA OF HAVANA'S EARLY MILITARY SUCCESSES IN ANGOLA, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT IF MACHEL REQUESTED OPERATIONAL TROOPS IN ADDITION TO TRAINERS TO AID IN DEFENSE OF BEGIN UNDERLINE MOZAMBIQUE END UNDERLINE, CASTRO WOULD PROBABLY RESPOND FAVORABLY--WITHIN LIMITS.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 295724

3. THE INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL CUBAN MILITARY PERSONNEL

COULD TAKE THREE FORMS:

--ADVISERS TO INDIVIDUAL MOZAMBICAN ARMY UNITS TO INCREASE THEIR PROFICIENCY IN OPERATING SOVIET- OR CUBAN-SUPPLIED WEAPONS;

--SUB-UNIT-SIZED CADRES OF CUBAN TROOPS WHO WOULD MAN SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY THEMSELVES, BUT WHO WOULD BE INTEGRATED INTO MOZAMBICAN ARMY UNITS;

--INTEGRAL CUBAN ARMY UNITS WHICH WOULD ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEFENSE OF DESIGNATED SENSITIVE BORDER AREAS.

4. NONE OF THESE OPTIONS WOULD BE INCONSISTENT WITH CUBA'S STATED POLICY REGARDING MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS, BUT FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS WE BELIEVE THAT THE FIRST TWO POSSIBILITIES ARE MORE LIKELY THAN THE THIRD.

--CUBA IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING SERIOUS ECONOMIC STRAINS THAT HAVE NECESSITATED CUTBACKS IN ITS FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND CANCELLATION OR RENEGOTIATION OF CONTRACTED PURCHASES ABROAD.

--THESE STRAINS HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY BEEN AGGRAVATED BY THE COSTS OF THE CUBAN MILITARY EFFORT IN ANGOLA, WHICH SHOWS NO SIGN OF WINDING DOWN.

--CUBAN LEADERS HAVE PROBABLY BEEN SOMEWHAT SOBERED BY THEIR FAILURE TO ACHIEVE A RAPID MILITARY SOLUTION IN ANGOLA AND WOULD THEREFORE BE HESITANT TO UNDERTAKE A MAJOR COMBAT ROLE IN AN EVEN MORE REMOTE AREA WHILE THEY ARE STILL HEAVILY COMMITTED IN ANGOLA.

WHILE NONE OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS WOULD NECESSARILY RULE OUT THE DISPATCH OF CUBAN COMBAT UNITS, WE BELIEVE THAT THE CUBANS WOULD PREFER TO KEEP THEIR MILITARY COMMITMENT IN MOZAMBIQUE ON A FAIRLY MODEST SCALE AND CONFINE IT TO TRAINING AND DEFENSIVE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 295724

OPERATIONS. THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED VISIT OF CUBAN COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIALS TO MAPUTO MAY HAVE RESULTED IN SOME GENERAL AGREEMENTS ALONG THESE LINES, BUT WE HAVE NO DETAILS OF THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CUBANS' DISCUSSIONS WITH FRELIMO.

5. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE CUBANS WILL BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN OFFENSIVE GUERRILLA OR CONVENTIONAL

MILITARY OPERATIONS INSIDE BEGIN UNDERLINE RHODESIA END UNDERLINE, AT LEAST FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. THEY WILL PROBABLY FOLLOW A POLICY TOWARD THE GUERRILLAS SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH THEY USED WITH SWAPO (I.E., PROVIDING TRAINING AND ARMS, BUT NO TROOPS). THERE IS NO INDICATION AS YET THAT THE CUBANS ARE SUPPORTING ANY ONE OF THE ZIMBABWEAN NATIONALIST GROUPS REPRESENTED AT GENEVA OVER THE OTHERS. CUBAN RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONALISTS APPEAR TO BE CHanneLED THROUGH THE MOZAMBICANS AND ARE THEREFORE PROBABLY LIMITED LARGELY TO THEIR CONTACTS WITH ZANLA/ZIPA COMMANDERS IN MOZAMBIQUE. WE SUSPECT THAT THE CUBANS ARE SOMEWHAT LEERY OF BECOMING TOO CLOSELY INVOLVED WITH A GUERRILLA FORCE WHOSE POPULAR SUPPORT AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WITHIN RHODESIA ARE QUESTIONABLE. THEY MAY ALSO BE INFLUENCED TO SOME EXTENT BY SOVIET SUPPORT FOR ZAPU.

6. THE SOVIETS PROBABLY DO NOT WANT A LARGE CUBAN COMBAT FORCE IN MOZAMBIQUE. A LARGE FORCE WOULD REQUIRE SUBSTANTIAL LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AND RAISE THE SPECTRE OF A NEGATIVE US REACTION, BUT MOSCOW MIGHT WELL LOOK FAVORABLY UPON A MODERATE INCREASE IN THE CUBAN MILITARY PRESENCE AS INDICATED ABOVE. THE MAIN VARIABLES, HOWEVER, WOULD BE THE ATTITUDE OF THE FRONT-LINE STATES TOWARD A CUBAN MILITARY FORCE AND THE LIMITS THEY DETERMINE FOR ITS ROLE.

7. THERE IS NO QUESTION, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRESSURES TO REQUEST AND ACCEPT INCREASED CUBAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE ARE MOUNTING AND MAY WELL BECOME IRRESISTIBLE IF RHODESIAN CROSS-BORDER RAIDS CONTINUE, ESPECIALLY IF THE DIPLOMATIC PROCESS WERE TO BREAK DOWN COMPLETELY.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 295724

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